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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

August 18, 1971

Dr. Hector P. Garcia
American GI Forum of the U.S.
1315 Bright Street
Corpus Christi, Texas 78405

Dear Hector:

Thank you for your most informative letter and the documentation attached.

Allow me first to congratulate you for your continued dedication and interest in seeking to eliminate many of the inequities of the past that continue to plague our present day society and impede the advancement of the Mexican American.

I know that, at times, you perhaps have felt to be alone in your efforts, that your pleas were disregarded and your warnings unheeded. However, you have not been alone, your voice has been heard and your pleas acknowledged, although redress of these grievances may have been slow in coming.

Each one of us plays a most vital role in our society, but our actions are governed by various constrictions, such as those that define our respective authority or limit our jurisdiction. As to the problems of some of the Corpus Christi schools--those dealing with physical and health situations--I am sure you would readily agree that neither you nor I can tolerate such conditions! The fact that these conditions are apparently prevalent only in the predominantly Mexican American schools certainly does lend credence to an allegation of unfair and discriminatory policies, or gross neglect, to say the least.

However, as you well know, the local populace have the absolute control and say-so over the election of the school board which governs and administers the public schools of that community. My role as a United States Senator, however, allows me the right and opportunity to assure you that no federal funds are illegally used in any way that would aid or abet racial, ethnic, cultural or religious discrimination. Any information you might have, which would indicate otherwise, should be readily brought to the attention of the proper authorities. In this respect, I stand ready to lend my assistance to you on any problem related to federal program funds.

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Since the Corpus Christi schools are involved in the current Cisneros litigation, I feel it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific issues involved in this case, such as relate to pupil or faculty assignment, as you cite in your attached documentation.

If you remember, in our meeting at the Driscoll Hotel in Corpus, during the general campaign for my election to the Senate, when I met with you, Dr. Cleo, Tony Canales and Jimmy De Anda, I made my views perfectly clear as to where I stood on the education of Mexican American children. I am definitely opposed to any policy, custom or practice of segregation or discrimination of the Mexican American school child. Furthermore, I stated that the Mexican American should be recognized as an identifiable ethnic minority when integration policies are implemented.

When I say that I believe in the concept of neighborhood schools, I am not saying that I am in favor of "de facto" or "de jure" segregation. I am saying that I believe in the excellence of education for all children, regardless of race, religion or ethnic background.

When I want is the best in education for all children. I certainly do not want old injustices to be perpetuated nor do I favor any mass bussing of students solely for the sake of obtaining some mythical racial balance. It is up to the local community, however, to seek a solution that will have the least traumatic effect on the educational process of the children.

Although the school integration issue is now before the courts, various proposed constitutional amendments have been introduced in the Congress dealing with school integration, such as pupil assignment, busing, etc. But, to get a constitutional amendment adopted, it must have first the votes of two-thirds of Congress and then the ratifying votes of three-fourths of the state legislatures. I seriously doubt that any of these measures will meet with success.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Bentsen